**Putting your head over the parapet**

Consider this:

A group of young men enlisted in the Army. From a ragtag bunch of men from all walks of life, they ended up all wearing the same haircut and wearing the same uniform, all receiving the same training, and all going to the battle front. All sitting in the trenches across no man’s land from an equally uniformed and trained enemy.

And whilst they are sitting in the trenches, they are relatively safe.

But when the whistle blows, and they have to clamber up the ladders into that no man’s land then they face the rain of bullets of the enemy. It is in only when they were advancing that they drew the attention of enemy. It is only when their head was over the parapet that they became a target.

I have entitled this sermon today “Putting your head over the parapet”

The church is an army – in fact that is how the Salvation Army actually identifies itself.

We are recruits into the army of God and we receive weekly training to be a good follower of Jesus, to be a good soldier.

Our purpose is to go out into all the world, preaching and teaching and making disciples and baptising them. That is what we are being trained to do.

The churches are the trenches. Relatively safe, until our heads rise above the parapet, until we advance on the enemy.

My family lived in Hamilton near the University, and we used to laugh at what we called the professional student who went from one university degree to another without actually going out into the workforce and putting what they had learned into practice. Head full of knowledge but no application of that knowledge.

I think some of that criticism may be pointed at the church too. Sitting in the pews listening to sermon upon sermon week in and week out, year in year out, but with no application outside the church walls.

The Devil likes us to be hunkered down in our trenches. He has no problem that we gather in the churches. Because when we are there and feeling safe, we are not advancing into his territory. When we are hunkered down behind the walls and the drawbridge is up, we are no threat to him.

Catherine Booth, founder of the Salvation Army with her husband William describes the church: A barracks is meant to be a place where real soldiers were to be fed and equipped for war, not a place to settle down in or as a comfortable snuggery in which to enjoy ourselves [[1]](#footnote-1)

But when we take steps into that no man’s land, all of the devil’s barbs and arrows and forces are focused on us.

He does not say “Hey, welcome, take the land that I think is mine, take the souls I have captured. By all means, help yourself.”

J O Fraser, an early missionary into China wrote: “I know enough about Satan to realise that he will have all his weapons ready for determined opposition. He would be a missionary simpleton who expected plain sailing in any work for God.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

We are to put our heads over the parapet and advance into the land claimed by the enemy.

I want us to be realistic about what opposition we face. I want us as Paul writes to the church at Corinth, to be able to say *We are not ignorant of his devices* (2 Cor 2:11)

When we recognise that there will be opposition to us, we can be prepared. We must not underestimate the strength of our foe, but we need not be in constant fear of him.

We are to advance into the enemies territory, aware that we will face opposition.

General Douglas McArthur in WW2 in his usual optimistic way said: The enemy is behind us. The enemy is in front of us. The enemy is to the right and to the left of us. They can’t get away this time.

You may claim that the enemy is defeated at the cross of Jesus Christ and you would be right

Jesus said to his disciples in Luke 10:18 *“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”*

And in Revelation 12:*9 The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.*

While the defeat of Satan was achieved by Jesus’ death and subsequent resurrection, Satan has not yet been destroyed. Satanic strongholds remain. Jesus has commissioned his disciples to participate in the mopping up operation.

September 2, 1945, VJ Day was the day that Japan surrendered to the Allies, effectively the end of World War II, but a peace treaty between Japan and most of the Allies was not signed until 1952, and between Japan and the Soviet Union until 1956. The war was won but not over, fighting continued in both Europe and Japan even after the official surrender.

So for us, Satan is defeated but fights on.

When you spray weeds in your garden, they are dead but they don’t know it yet. They may flower but eventually they wizen up and die.

In that mopping up role of defeating the enemy, our training comes into play.

1 Peter 5:8-9 *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith…*

Weapons have been made available to us by God for offensive purposes. These include prayer and fasting, truth, righteousness, the Gospel, faith, salvation, the Word of God, the name of Jesus and the blood of Jesus.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Are we proficient in the use of these weapons or are they still in the wrapping and box they came in?

We may also know that we have available the armour of God in Ephesians 6:10–18 (NRSV)

*10 … be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. 15 As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. 16 With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.*

However, knowledge of the armour of God is not enough, we need to put it on.

There is an advert about water safety on TV at the moment where the boatie says “yes, I have all the safety equipment, it is in the cabin stowed under the seats.” No use under there – life jackets have to be worn to be effective. Too late to go get them when you are sinking or have fallen off the boat.

In our cars, it is no use having a seatbelt unless you use it. Too late as you hurtle toward an oncoming car to reach around and try and put it on.

So it is with our spiritual armour. It needs to be worn.

Sound doctrine is absolutely essential to victorious spiritual warfare over Satan, but it is not enough to know sound doctrine. we must use it and apply it[[4]](#footnote-4)

When I was in the Police, we did arms training. Originally when we had emptied our magazine at the target on the range, we had to pick up the spent shells, but then they found that if we did that in the practice, we would do that in a real-life situation. So we left them on the ground until the end of the day. A Policeman died because he was picking up his spent shell instead of looking at where the offender had gone. What we practice and practice becomes muscle memory, and so it is with the training we do as Christians before we go over the parapet.

We practice in the non-threatening times the things that will save our lives in times of conflict.

John Bunyan, imprisoned for his faith wrote that prayer is a shield to the soul, a delight to God, and a scourge to Satan.[[5]](#footnote-5) Even in prison, he could continue his fight against the enemy.

Mrs Howard Taylor, in her biography of J O Taylor wrote that when in the thick of the fight, when you are the object of attack, plead less and claim more on the ground of the blood of Jesus Christ.[[6]](#footnote-6)

A quirky story to illustrate that: the Roman emperor Constantine had been thinking about the misfortunes that befell commanders who invoked the help of many different gods and decided to seek divine aid in the forthcoming battle from the One God. At noon, Constantine saw a cross of light imposed over the sun. Attached to it, in Greek characters, was the saying "In this, conquer!". Not only Constantine, but the whole army saw the miracle. That night, Christ appeared to the Roman emperor in a dream and told him to make a replica of the sign he had seen in the sky, which would be a sure defence in battle. In Constantine’s army their armour and their shields and their banners bore the Cross of Christ.

We do not need to wear a cross or wear an emblem like Constantine, because as blood bought children of God, we have protection of the blood of Jesus with us.

We are children of God; we claim the cross of Jesus, we claim Jesus’ blood as our authority over the enemy.

We sing a song called *No Longer Slaves* and, in that song, we sing:

And I'm no longer a slave to fear

Oh, I am a child of God

I'm no longer a slave to fear

Oh, I am a child of God

From my mother's womb

You have chosen me

Your Love has called my name

And I've been born again into your family

Oh, Your blood flows through my veins

Continuing the Revelation 12 verses I read before:

*11 But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death.*

The best way to keep the enemy out is to keep Christ in. The sheep needs not be terrified by the wolf; they have but to stay close to the Shepherd. It is not the praying sheep Satan fears, but the presence of the Shepherd (A W Tozer) [[7]](#footnote-7)

Then we can affirm categorically …

Isaiah 54: 17 *No weapon that is fashioned against us shall prosper, and we shall confute every tongue that rises against us in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, says the LORD.*

The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my saviour; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety. Psalm 18:2.

1. Ray Comfort *How to Win Souls and Influence People* 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Taylor, Mrs Howard *Behind the Ranges: Fraser of Lisuland*, 87 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Stuart Robinson *Persevering Prayer: growing church supernaturally* 54-55 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mark Bubeck *The Adversary* 102 & 94 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Comfort 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Taylor 129 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Mark Bubeck *The Adversary* 69 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)